

# Teaching Mission in an Age of World Christianity:

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History, Theology, Anthropology, and  
Gender in the Classroom

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Mission and world Christianity are terms that seem to exclude each other. If Christianity is already a world religion, what is the need for mission?<sup>1</sup> The tension between world Christianity and mission also reveals a deeper assumption about the kind of Christianity is referenced in the statement. The assumption is that Christianity is a Western religion and once it has spread throughout the world there is no further need for missionaries to go and evangelize people in distant lands. According to Peter Phan, the myth of Christianity as a Western religion is mostly seen in the way the history of Christianity continues to be taught in contemporary seminaries and colleges by focusing on the Western tradition while ignoring or downplaying the importance of the Eastern expansion of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> This “institutional and parochial” way of teaching the history of Christianity is being rejected in theory by most historians, but unfortunately, mission studies is still taught in the United States as if the Western tradition is universally normative in the spread of Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

By the late 1970s, Andrew Walls drew attention to the fact that Christianity in the twentieth century was spreading and gaining most converts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America while at the same time Europe and North America were experiencing stagnation and decline in numbers and fervor.<sup>4</sup> This demographic shift and the recognition of seeing Christianity as a world religion spread in all six continents has given way to conceiving the study of mission, ecumenics, and interreligious studies under the new nomenclature of world Christianity. The new field of world Christianity studies the Christian faith as expressed in all six continents placing emphasis on the experiences of the poor, women of color, and marginalized communities in the Majority World.<sup>5</sup> These churches were called at one time in missionary circles the ‘receiving’ or ‘younger’ churches. Given that the majority of Christians now live in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific, and that the gospel was spread mostly through indigenous Christians, how are we teaching mission in North American colleges, universities, and theological seminaries? If the explosion of Christianity in the Majority World was possible because Christianity was already being contextualized by local agency, what role do the European and North American churches play today? Are the experiences of Christians in the Majority World at the center of our teaching of

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1 Peter Phan, “World Christianity and Christian Mission: Are They Compatible? Insights from the Asian Churches,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32:4 (October 2008), 193-200.

2 Phan, “World Christianity and Christian Mission,” 194.

3 Wilbert R. Shenk, “Toward a Global Church History,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (April 1996), 50-57.

4 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1997).

5 Dale T. Irvin, “World Christianity: An Introduction,” *The Journal of World Christianity* 1:1 (2008), 1-26.

mission in North America? What are the new resources for teaching mission in an age of world Christianity? These questions are of significant importance to mission studies as it faces the new reality of world Christianity.

Andrew Walls in the pioneering essay, “Structural Problems in Mission Studies,” argued that what was needed was a complete revamping of the curriculum in order to place the cross-cultural diffusion of Christianity as the lifeblood of the religion.<sup>6</sup> Walls stated, “If culture is the workplace of Christian theology, it follows that the present Christian interaction with the cultures of the South—as intricate and far-reaching in their different ways as the Hellenistic Roman—marks a new creative stage in Christian theology.”<sup>7</sup> Justo Gonzalez evaluates the history and legacy of the discipline of Church History by engaging the changing nature and demographic makeup of the shifting center of gravity of the Christian religion as exemplified by Walls calling them “cataclysmic.”<sup>8</sup> He argues that the old map is characterized by the centers of power—those of the North Atlantic, Europe and North America. Because Christianity is entering into a new consciousness, this requires a new map, a polycentric map.<sup>9</sup> This polycentric map will reflect the reality that today there are many centers, both in the actual life of the church and in the way the past history of the church is being written. This new map makes it impossible to separate the history of the church from the history of missions or the history of the expansion of the Christianity.

As Christianity has become a truly universal religion, with deep roots in every culture, it is also becoming more and more contextualized, and therefore, out of its many centers of come different readings of the entire history of the church. There is also a changing topography in the study of church history. Geography is not concerned only with the horizontal expanse of the land; it is also concerned with the vertical, with the mountains and the valleys—with the topography of the land. In this topographical changes new voices previously unheard are being heard: people of color, women, children, victims, and vanquished people are the new interlocutors who live different realities and ask new questions.<sup>10</sup> As Walls pointed out, “This is perhaps the first important point to remember about theology: that since it springs out of practical situations, it is therefore *occasional* and *local* in character ... It is

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6 Walls, “Structural Problems in Mission Studies,” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 143-159. First published in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15 (October 1991), 146-155.

7 Walls, “Structural Problems,” 146.

8 Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Changing Shape of Church History* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2002), 33-46.

9 Gonzalez, *The Changing Shape of Church History*, 12-15.

10 Gonzalez, *The Changing Shape of Church History*, 19-32.

useless for us to determine what we think an African theology ought to be doing: it will concern itself with questions that worry Africans, and will leave blandly alone all sorts of questions which we think absolutely vital.”<sup>11</sup>

David Bosch reminded us that theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character. In the first century, theology was not a luxury of the world-conquering church but was generated by the emergency situation in which the missionizing church found itself. In this situation mission became the mother of theology. However, as Europe became Christian and Christianity the establish religion, theology lost its missionary dimension. Therefore, today missiology should reclaim its critical function in theological discourse by helping theology face the concrete world in local situations instead of giving universalizing principles based on the Enlightenment and Greek philosophy. As Bosch claimed, “In this role, missiology acts as a gadfly in the house of theology, creating unrest and resisting complacency, opposing every ecclesiastical impulse to self-preservation, every desire to stay what we are, every inclination toward provincialism and parochialism, every fragmentation of humanity into regional or ideological blocks, every exploitation of some sectors of humanity by the powerful, every religious, ideological, or cultural imperialism, and every exaltation of the self-sufficiency of the individual over other people or over other parts of creation.”<sup>12</sup>

The changes in the center of gravity of Christianity must concern missiologists in the West to make an introspection of how their discipline is crafted with “a hegemony postulate” which does not allow for a mutual dialogue, but rather, the conditions for such dialogue to take place are for everybody to agree and abide by the rules imposed by the West.<sup>13</sup> Tite Tiénou argues that the West’s self-perception about keeping the gates of scholarship secure by coercing its scientific methodology as the universal validity for real understanding presupposes its superiority over other forms of knowledge and as such is ethnocentric and colonizing.<sup>14</sup>

It appears that David Bosch’s description of missiology as an annoying presence in the house of theology pushing it to be creative and not to conform to ideological purity mascaraed in universal categories has come to fruition in *Theology without Borders*.<sup>15</sup> William Dyrness and Oscar García Johnson challenge Eurocentrism in theology and propose a glocal understanding of theology that

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11 Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 10-11.

12 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 496.

13 Tite Tiénou, “Christian Theology in a Era of World Christianity,” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 37-51.

14 Tiénou, “Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity,” 47-48.

15 William A. Dyrness and Oscar García Johnson, *Theology Without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015).

is multicultural, transnational, and decolonizing. García-Johnson narrates part of his autobiography to illustrate the challenges he faces as a Latin American theologian in the United States on choosing what methodology to follow in constructing theology: the Western encyclopedia or new modalities rooted in his Latino reality? For him, Western theologians should acknowledge the politics of locality in their own theological enterprises as something that has contributed to the epistemological superiority of that tradition over other ways of knowing and relating. He challenges the Western theological establishment by proposing a “transoccidental” methodology of decolonizing theology from its Western epistemological imperialism. Transoccidentalism would be a collaborative, interdisciplinary, and glocal hermeneutics that embraces its own locality while embracing in constructive dialogue other local and global contextual realities.<sup>16</sup>

Doing theology in an era of world Christianity means not only decolonizing the West from its position of power and privilege, but also creating new alternatives to formulate theology. It is at this conjunction that missiology could be a beacon of light by challenging the assumed universals of the Western canon and by introducing new visions and resources to construct theology. In this sense, Phan argues that the contextual realities in which humans find themselves are resources for theology “insofar as they embody and manifest the presence and action of God and his Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> Here the resources for doing theology are ordinary people themselves, women and girls sold into slavery, adherents of other religions and their texts and practices, non-Western philosophical traditions, diverse monastic traditions, and non-Western cultures.<sup>18</sup>

The first section of the APM proceeding addresses theological questions such as what theological metaphors or models for excellent teaching and learning are most generative for thinking about teaching mission studies in an age of world Christianity? What are the new resources for teaching mission in an age of world Christianity? How missiology influences theology? In the keynote address, “Teaching Mission in and for World Christianity: Content and Method,” Peter Phan presents three theses for a new understanding in the relationship between mission studies and world Christianity. First, missiology is crucial in the formation and articulation of theology in an age of world Christianity. Here missiology is the handmaiden of theology. Second, missiologists must understand that business cannot continue as usual when it comes to teaching mission studies in an age of world Christianity. One of the basic and fundamental questions to be address should be the Western influence in the mission curriculum. Third, there should be a marriage between missiology and the history of Christianity. Phan argues that

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16 Dyrness and García Johnson, *Theology Without Borders*, 16-22.

17 Peter Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianity: Different Resources and New Methods,” *Journal of World Christianity* 1:1 (2008), 27-53 [37].

18 Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianity,” 39.

“implicit in the subsequent separation between church history and missiology is the colonialist understanding of Christianity/Church as the West and mission as the Rest.”<sup>19</sup>

William Gregory’s paper “Orthopraxy, Hyper-doxo, and Pope Francis’ Missionary Vision,” addresses how Pope Francis has shifted missiological attention to orthopraxy while simultaneously criticizing counter-missionary approaches to thinking about doctrine and orthodoxy. This presentation explores the nature and significance of this shift in the Roman Catholic Church. Gregory explains how Francis is reemphasizing Christian identity within the Catholic Church in terms of missionary identity, which focus on the poor, the vulnerable, and the needy.

In “Theological Metaphors of Teaching Mission in An Age of World Christianity in the North American Context,” David Thang Moe presents not *what* to teach, but how to teach mission in an age of World Christianity in the context of North American seminaries/theological institutions. In response to the encounter between North American teachers and Global South students, the paper proposes three theological metaphors of teaching mission as the excellent pedagogies in an age of World Christianity. First, a shepherding metaphor of guiding in which teachers as guides should know the needs of their sheep and the models of how to guide them. The second metaphor is a hospitable form of teaching that demands gift exchange between the hosts and the guests. Students have been for many years on the receiving side, but hospitable teachers should reveal their students’ gifts and affirm what they have to offer by using their gifts. The third metaphor is a dialogical method of subject-centered teaching where teachers and students are co-learners to discern God’s voice anew in the process of interaction. Moe concludes by defining mission as a dialogical discipline, teaching must be both mutually informative and transformative.

The final paper in this section is by Sarita D. Gallagher. “The Elephant in the Room: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Missiological Education” identify the critical need within Western academia to move from an ethnocentric understanding of theology to a global theological framework. Western missiological and theological education is often restricted to solely Western hermeneutics, methodologies, and worldview. While the rich diversity of the global Church is sprinkled throughout traditional Western education, the real vibrancy of global missiology, theology, and ecclesiology has yet to fully impact Western academia. In reflecting on this lack of diversity and inclusivity, Gallagher identify two paradigm shifts that need to take place before Western academia can engage in a true global dialogue. Gallagher

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19 Peter Phan, “Teaching Missiology in and for World Christianity,” APM Plenary Address, June 16, 2016, 9.

argues that by re-determining who has a voice in academia and by listening to global theology in transformative ways, the West can begin to engage meaningfully and humbly as an equal partner in global academic discourse.

The second section is devoted to historical questions such as what historical, biblical, or theological factors seem to be contributing to the changes one observes in mission studies in an age of world Christianity? Who are the new subjects in teaching mission in an age of world Christianity? The plenary session that addressed historical questions at the 2016 APM was “Teaching Christian Mission in an Age of World Christianity: A Reflection on the Centenary of the 1916 Panama Congress” by Philip Wingeier-Rayo. Wingeier-Rayo presents the relationship between mission and world Christianity using the Panama Congress of 1916 as an example. Wingeier-Rayo’s argument is that over the last 100 years since the Panama Congress, teaching mission has shifted in its understanding of ecumenism, seen the contribution of indigenous churches and placing more emphasis on what God is doing through the Holy Spirit.

Robert L. Gallagher’s essay, “Case Studies Teaching Our Contemporary Age of World Christianity,” explores five case studies of educational institutions within early movements of Christian expansion from post-apostolic times to the beginning of modern missions. The movements examined are the Church of the East, Celtic Christianity, the Franciscans, Reformation with Lutheranism and Calvinism, and the modern mission platform of Pietism. Drawing from these findings, this essay will note patterns across movements, including holistic training of students together with the intensity of academics in theology and languages. The paper’s historic perspectives of God’s past work in mission studies can guide missiologists toward a biblical and insightful future of teaching Christian mission in an age of world Christianity.

The last essay on the historical section is by Matt Friedman. In “How the West Was Won: World Christianity as Historic Reality,” Friedman argues that since the end of the previous century, there has been an increasing realization that the Church in the Majority world now forms the “majority” of the Christian population worldwide. To read much of the literature regarding this phenomenon, one would think that the idea of the church being a worldwide community was something that has arisen recently. As one glances back at the history of Christian faith, however, one is struck by the reality that the mission of the Church has *always* been “from everywhere to everywhere,” and that the Gospel was brought to the West itself (insofar as the “West” could be understood to have even existed at that time) by people from “colonies” in other parts of the world. Far from mission from outside the West being a “new” thing, the situation can now be understood as a return to the historic norm, in which followers of Jesus from any part of the world can expect to be engaged in God’s work among people anywhere else.



The third section deals with anthropological issues on mission and world Christianity in educational settings. Janice Horsager Rasmussen's essay "The World's Christians: Strategies for Teaching International Graduate Students in Kenya's Christian Universities" addresses how globalization influences learning processes in educational institutions and students in Africa. Her research indicates that very little is known about graduate international students "learning experiences" in the United States showing the factors that hindered and facilitated their learning as well as effective teaching strategies.

Aminta Arrington's essay, "Serving and Being Served: The Christian Practice of Hospitality Inside and Outside the Classroom," argues that hospitality as a framework for teaching mission in world Christianity is a valuable strategy whose meaning is understood in most African, Asian, or Latin American cultures better than the West. Hospitality is a practice that cultivates empathy because it requires listening and learning. Hospitality is inherently reciprocal, as all brings gifts to the table. Finally, she sees hospitality engendering transformation because it forces us to leave familiar structures and view life through the eyes of the Other. Through learning about, then practicing hospitality, my students experienced empathy, reciprocity, and transformation, all essential as we transition to the era of World Christianity.

The final section is on gender issues in mission studies and world Christianity. This section addresses questions such as What changes in one's own teaching or in an institution's curriculum are necessary for promoting gender equality in mission studies? What case studies or other instructional methods best promote gender specific mission practices? What would the study of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America look like if scholars put women into the center of their research? What does putting the experiences of majority world women at the center of our research agendas means for professors in North America? How could this process be achieved? The plenary address delivered for this section was by Mai-Anh LeTran. Mai-Ahn Le Tran's essay, "The Bodies We Teach By: (En)Gendering Mission for Global Christianities" uses critical pedagogy to invite missiologists to ponder the possibilities of a *critical intersectional pedagogical stance* that may be fitting for the teaching of "Christian mission" in an age in which Christianity remains dominant, albeit not in numbers. At this intersectional location, the missiologist is a "teaching body" inasmuch as they are an "interpreting body." Thus, to explore who missiologists are as "teachers of mission" with attention to great commissions and omissions, we ask two guiding questions: what does it mean to take seriously *our* teaching bodies? and what does it mean to take seriously the bodies *with* and *about* whom we teach?

If missiologists take their teaching bodies seriously, they will discover that their bodies are visible, vulnerable, and viable. Also if missiologists take seriously the bodies with and about whom we teach we will discover the "omissions" that many times trap us to legitimize the status quo. For LeTran, "omission" is *not* a problem



of those being omitted; rather, it is a problem of those who are fighting hard to maintain their intellectual center and mono-centrism. Thus, the question for the discipline of Christian mission studies is *not* what to do with those whom we've excluded, but rather what to do with those who continue to engage in exclusionary strategies. For her, the teacher of mission may learn to become a "border- crosser" who wields the *transgressive* power of counter-stories that subtly offer "oppositional" definitions of reality. Some call this a "pedagogy of dissent." This means we submit our own teaching bodies as "oppositional text," just as we strive to interject otherly-marked interpreting bodies as counter-texts to the teaching canon.

Mary Cloutier's essay narrates the life of Mary McLeod Bethune. Bethune was born in freedom to a large family that had known the deprivations and injustice of slavery. Her life spanned from 1875 until the mid-1950s, allowing her to speak to, and participate fully in, the social transformation of the twentieth century. Despite her many accomplishments and influence in American history, Mary was prevented from realizing her girlhood dream of becoming a missionary in Africa, when her application to the Presbyterian Board of Mission was denied. Mary would later temper the injustice by suggesting that her missionary calling was based on a selfish desire for travel and excitement. However, hidden in the Presbyterian archives is a handwritten letter from Mary to the Presbyterian Board, which reflects her true perspective on their decision, and reveals that Mary was *certain* of her calling and qualification for mission service—and that the Board's decision was based solely on her ethnicity and race.

As a conclusion, Angel Santiago Vendrell's essay, "Gendered Mission: Educational Work or Itinerating Preaching? The Mission Practice of the Presbyterian Church USA in Barranquilla, Colombia, 1880-1920," narrates two gendered based evangelistic approaches developed in the Barranquilla mission of the Presbyterian Church USA in the beginning of their missionary work to Colombia in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> One was directed towards the proclamation of the gospel through preaching and the establishment of churches. The missionaries who used this method were more conservative in their theology and worldview. They were interested in the salvation of the soul, but never took care of the daily affairs of life. The other group also thought that they were evangelizing the Colombian people through education. This group of missionaries was theologically more liberal and their agenda of educating the middle and upper classes to influence the elites of the nation was well received by those social sectors. Even though both approaches differ in their methodology, the final goal was the same, to bring them to the blessings of Western civilization through Jesus Christ. The first part of the essay gives a historical overview of missionary work and the formation of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia, especially the missionary work in Barranquilla. In this section,

20 This paper was not presented at the 2016 APM meetings, but was written with the purpose of covering any of the presenter's papers in case of any emergency if they could not come to the meeting.

the female missionaries faced great setbacks and attacks against their mission theory by male missionaries. The second part addresses the ministry of Bible women who converted through the missionary efforts of the single female missionaries. The final part presents the missionary efforts to trained national leaders. One of the disparities that the section reveals is that women were not invited to participate in formal theological education while they were fierce educators, evangelists, and pillar of their communities.

